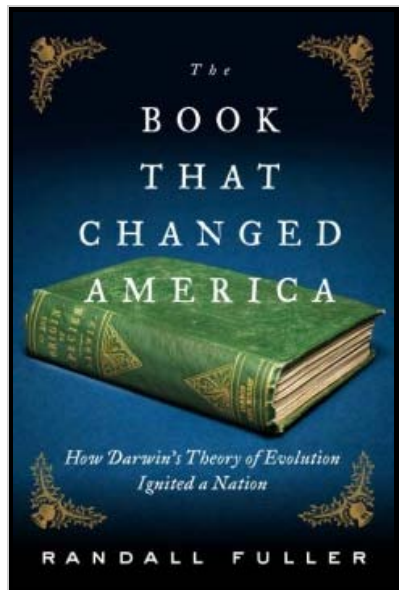


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The Book That Changed America

by Randall Fuller

Price: \$27.00(Hardcover)

Published: January 24, 2017

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From the Publisher: The compelling story of the effect of Charles Darwin's book *On the Origin of Species* on a diverse group of American writers, abolitionists, and social reformers, including Henry David Thoreau and Bronson Alcott, in 1860 "A must-read for everyone interested in Civil-War-era history." - Publishers Weekly In early 1860, a single copy of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* was read and discussed by five important American intellectuals who seized on the book's assertion of a common ancestry for all creatures as a powerful argument against slavery. The book first came into the hands of Harvard botanist Asa Gray, who would lead the fight for the theory in America. Gray passed his heavily annotated copy to the child welfare reformer Charles Loring Brace, who saw value in natural selection's premise that mankind was destined...

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About The Author

Randall Fuller

Randall Fuller is the author of *From Battlefields Rising: How the Civil War Transformed American Literature*, which won the Phi Beta Kappa's Christian Gauss Award for best literary criticism, and *Emerson's Ghosts: Literature, Politics, and the Making of Americanists*. He has...

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


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What We Say

The lightning bolt, the Big Bang of modern science that was Charles Darwin's publication of "On The Origin Of Species" is given its due in this engaging work of history, which might just as easily have been dubbed "The Book That Changed The World." Like Pulitzer Prize winner Louis Menand's "The Metaphysical Club," Fuller uses the hook of Darwin's book to offer a group portrait of American thinkers and writers. We implicitly understand the importance of the Theory of Evolution on science, but Fuller awakens us again to its impact on all the sciences, not to mention philosophy, literature, politics, society at large and the ever-volatile issue of slavery. He shows how Darwin's ideas were immediately seized upon by

abolitionists. Even though Darwin cautiously avoided discussing the theory's implications on the origins of people, it was obvious to everyone where his ideas led and how they reinforced the common humanity of all people. Fine, but Fuller then shows the dismay -- the buyer's remorse even -- of many ardent abolitionists as they wrestled with Darwin's work and how it challenged and undercut their faith, seeming to relegate God to observer. Fuller shows this passionate turmoil cutting a swath far and wide. But its sting is especially felt by the group of Transcendentalists and their friends, people like Emerson and Thoreau and the Harvard botanist Asa Gray (Darwin's most able defender in the US). They wrestled with his ideas, from the influential thinker behind "Walden" right down to the talented young writer Louisa May Alcott, who was far readier than her well-intentioned father to see Darwin's ideas to their logical conclusion. (She wrote about interracial romance in an early novel.) Even those who fancied themselves scientists were confounded, for Darwin's approach in his book was the most radical of all. Forever after, science would involve facts and data and theories that could be tested and proven, ideas which led to specific results (if this, then that), results that could and must be proven again and again -- and then all of it checked independently by others. This was shockingly new. Philosophical musings, untestable speculations and appeals to the Almighty have no place in science and Darwin is the reason such an obvious necessity won the day. Towards the end, Fuller is juggling so many characters that he gets a little lost. We jump in time again and again, from well after the Civil War to its beginnings, from one person's death to another person's signal event years earlier and so on. It's a tad muddled, but all resolves in a lovely image of Thoreau seeing the wide open possibilities, the horizon that Darwin drew everyone's eye toward for the very first time, though it was always there. -- Michael Giltz

What Others Say

Advance Praise for *The Book That Changed America*

"A vibrant history of the reception of Charles Darwin's ideas by American minds and spirits . . . Fuller creates a rich tapestry of personalities and roiling ideas. In radiant prose, and with a sure eye for the telling detail, [he] reveals the shattering impact of Darwin's book on religious thought, scientific inquiry, and especially on debates over slavery . . . A fresh, invigorating history of philosophical and political struggles."
- *Kirkus Reviews* (starred)

"In this inventive work, which weaves two powerful events into a vibrant tapestry of antebellum intellectual life, Fuller beautifully describes how the engagement by a group of Transcendentalists with Darwin's newly published *On the Origin of Species* deepened their commitment to the antislavery movement. . .Elegant writing and an unusual approach to interpreting the time period make this a must-read for everyone interested in Civil War-era history."
- *Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

"Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* burst upon America at the same time that the nation was descending into...

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